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AUTHOR Hermann, Ruth; Singer, Vivian Hermann
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ABSTRACT

Intended for use by teachers, this guide suggests classroom techniques for using "Write Now," an Apple II program with music, motion, and pictures, to facilitate the teaching of manuscript handwriting skills to elementary school students. "Write Now" shows the student how to form curves and lines when writing letters of the alphabet, where the strokes start, the direction of the strokes, and the proper proportion. The program also has enrichment text on the screen that a parent or teacher can read aloud. In addition, all of the letters that the computer writes are large enough for an entire class to see, allowing the teacher to use the software in classroom presentations. Eight clusters of progressive lessons develop all of the upper and lower case letters according to the strokes required to form them. Starting with body geometry, students learn to write by listening to "key" music, following direction signals, and watching each illustrated letter as it is correctly written on the screen. The student may also choose to go in alphabetical order, starting at any letter, to learn pairs of upper and lower case letters or practice either upper case or lower case with sample words corresponding to the illustrations. "Write Now" also allows the student or the teacher to type in original words or groups of letters for the computer to demonstrate on the screen. This program has been used with special education classes, normal kindergarten through second grade classes, and in a literacy program for dyslexic inmates at the Nassau County Correction Center. (GL)

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Write Now

For the Apple IIc, IIe, and IIgs

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STUDENTS WITH DIFFERENT LEARNING STYLES ?

Vivian Singer, a director of computer vision systems, and Ruth Hermann, an educator specializing in reading , have developed a MANUSCRIPT HANDWRITING COMPUTER PROGRAM with music, motion and pictures, that runs on an Apple II c, II e or II gs. It is being used successfully in LEVITTOWN, NEW YORK schools.

The program is simple enough for a child to operate alone. The enrichment text appears on the screen for a teacher (or helper) to share. The letters in each lesson are large so that an entire class can see them. A teacher can easily plan a normal handwriting lesson in which the computer demonstrates each letter without anyone's hand or body in the way.

It reinforces learning:

1. Where strokes start
2. In which direction to go
3. How to form the curves and lines
4. Proper proportion

It has been tested and has received enthusiastic responses from teachers and children of different ages and abilities, from special education classes to normal kindergarten through second grade classes.

The program clarifies the teacher's (or helper's) instructions and repeats tedious processes with enthusiasm and endless patience.

In a literacy program at the Nassau County Correction Center, the inmates, who were considered dyslexic, are learning to read and write with this program, since it employs several modalities.

This learn-to-write program is available for immediate delivery with an instruction manual which includes suggestions for classroom techniques.

PRICE COMPLETE WITH MANUAL $40.00 POSTPAID.
(school vouchers accepted)

SINGER CONSULTANTS
832 BRENT DRIVE
WANTAGH,N.Y. 11793
TEL: (516) 781-5143

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- Maryalice McNamara for her enthusiasm and creativity while pioneering the use of this program in her kindergarten classes.

- Ernest Hermann, David Singer, and Eric and Ari Singer for their patience and support during the development of this program.

Ruth Hermann and Vivian Hermann Singer

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WRITE NOW

Introduction

Every first grade class has some children who have a problem learning manuscript handwriting. In a class of children with mild learning difficulties almost every child will have trouble. Continued correction is frustrating for the learner. "Write Now" is an innovative Apple II program with music, motion, and pictures which can make writing a joy. The computer is patient and accepting, and follows the child's directions. The program runs on an Apple IIc, IIe, and IIgs.

Simple to operate, "Write Now" has enrichment text on the screen that a parent or teacher can read aloud. In addition, all of the letters that the computer writes are large enough for an entire class to see. A teacher can easily plan a normal handwriting lesson in which the computer demonstrates letters and words without anyone's hand or body in the way of the students' view.

"Write Now" shows the student:

1. how to form the curves and lines
2. where strokes start
3. in which direction to go
4. proper proportion.

There are eight "clusters" of progressive lessons which develop all of the upper and lower case letters, in groups, according to the strokes needed to form them. Starting with body geometry, children learn to write by listening to "key" music, following direction signals, and watching each illustrated letter as it is correctly written on the screen.

The student may also choose to go in alphabetical order, starting at any letter, learning pairs of upper and lower case letters or practicing either upper case or lower case with sample words corresponding to the illustrations.

Just for fun, "Write Now" also allows the child or teacher to type in original words or groups of letters for the computer to demonstrate on the screen.

EVEN A YOUNG CHILD CAN DO IT!

"Write Now" needs a bare minimum of experience with computers. The only "skills" are:

1. Turning the computer on
2. Using the arrow keys to move around the screen - up, down, left, right
3. Pressing the SPACE bar, RETURN key and ESC key
4. Finding the letters on the keyboard, and using the shift key for capitals

All the rest is commentary.

CHOOSING A LESSON

The "menu" of lessons to choose from looks like a little map, with a car on the left hand side waiting to be "driven" somewhere:

Each spot on the map represents a handwriting lesson which is based on the letter(s) or symbols in that spot. You can "drive" the little car to one of the spots by pressing the arrow keys (up, down, right or left) at the right side of your keyboard (you do not have to hold down any other key.) The arrow key is the "gas pedal" of the car. When you hold it down the car will move. To stop the car and/or change direction, take your finger off the arrow key, then change arrow keys. When you drive your car to any spot, that lesson will start immediately. Be sure that the car hits *only* the desired spot.

The top two rows of spots on the map contain eight "stroke lessons", which build up all twenty-six letters of the alphabet, stroke by stroke. Each lesson concentrates on specific strokes:

1. Vertical and horizontal lines: l,-,F,E,L,T,I,H,i,t
2. Large circles and arcs: O,Q,C,G,U,u
3. Small circles and arcs: o,a,d,q,c,e,f
4. Small clockwise circles and arcs: h,n,r,m,p,b
5. Large clockwise circles and arcs: D,P,R,B
6. Clockwise "tails": g,J,j,S,s
7. Diagonal lines: N,Z,z,V,v,A,M,W,w
8. Complex diagonals: X,x,Y,y,K,k

The third row of spots on the map is for students who already have some knowledge of the letters. The spot marked "ABC Words" starts a lesson of capital letters in alphabetical order, with a practice word which begins with each letter. Similarly, "abc words" goes through the alphabet with small letters and the same practice words beginning with each small letter.

The spot marked "Aa" starts an alphabetical sequence of pairs of letters side by side on the screen. Each of these alphabetical lessons starts at any point in the alphabet that the student chooses.

There is one more spot at the bottom of the menu, marked "Your own words". This lesson is completely flexible, to allow the teacher or student to type in one word at a time for the computer to demonstrate.

USING THE STROKE LESSONS

Lessons 1, 2, and 7 begin with full-screen pictures of a child forming some shape with his body. This is a kinesthetic activity to help students understand the shape and direction of each kind of stroke. Encourage the student to stand up and imitate the child in the picture, to "feel" a straight line or a circle.

Lesson 1 introduces three different lines, with three kinesthetic pictures, before the student begins to write.

At the bottom of the screen you will see a "text window" with a little description of what is going on in the picture and what the child can do. Throughout the program there will be text like this for parents or teachers to share and discuss with the child. Naturally, most students at this level will not be able to read it, but none of the text is crucial to understanding the program. If an adult tells him what to do the first time a student sees each picture, he will learn to copy the positions on his own.

When the computer finishes "drawing" the picture on the screen, an additional line appears:

Press SPACE to go on, RETURN to repeat

At this point, you may:

a) Press the SPACE BAR to tell the computer to clear the screen and start the writing lesson.

b) Press the RETURN key to clear the screen and redraw the picture.

c) Press the ESC key to go back to the menu and choose another section of the program. The ESC key will take you back to the menu any time you see the message:

Press SPACE to go on, RETURN to repeat

THE ARROW

Before the computer writes each stroke on the screen, an arrow appears to show the starting point and the direction of that stroke.

THE MUSIC

A familiar tune plays to attract the child's attention. Each type of stroke has its own tune to help the child differentiate between strokes.

THE ILLUSTRATIONS

There is also a small illustration for each letter, as you probably have noticed. In case you have trouble figuring out what the illustration is, the text window will tell you.

Before the "Write Now" program clears the screen, it lets the little picture "flash" off to the right. The child's eyes are now moving in the right direction for writing words, and everyone can wave good-bye to the cat or the jeans or the tree as it leaves.

WRITING

The computer writes a letter (or single stroke, in some lessons) with a thin line, and then overlays it with a thick line. The student's pencil should still be down. As the computer makes the thin line, the child watches where it goes. While the computer draws the thick line, the child may close one eye and point along the line with a finger. Check to see that the child is pointing with his writing hand, at a distance from the screen.

There is a pause between writing the thin line and the overlay. This is for the child to look at the illustrations before watching the letter or letters being "written" a second time.

When there are no illustrations, it is a time to reflect on how the letters are formed. Remind the child to watch again.

Some children will need an intermediate step of forming the letter using their bodies. Several children can cooperate in making one letter, with each child forming one stroke.

[For children who need additional help: while the computer is writing a letter, write that letter on the child's back in the same rhythm.]

After the student has traced the letter in the air, she may also "write" it with her finger on the desk or table. You can help her to translate "up" and "down" to the correct direction on a flat surface. Point out that a vertical stroke always goes toward the body. Horizontal strokes always go from left to right.

It's finally time to pick up that pencil or crayon! The child may make the letter as many times as he likes, trying to form it exactly as the computer does. Some children may try to make their letter thick, as the computer does, by going over them. You can suggest that the computer only does this to help them remember how to form the letters. The computer lines are thick so that everyone can see them.

Notice that message in the text window again:

Press SPACE to go on, RETURN to repeat

Press the RETURN key each time you wish to repeat the demonstration of this letter.

Press the SPACE BAR to go on to the next letter in the sequence.

Press the ESC key to get back to the menu and choose another section of the program.

The message must be in the text window before any new direction is given to the computer.

USING THE ALPHABET LESSONS

Now that the student is already familiar with all of the letters, the alphabet lessons provide a bit more challenge.

Before the lesson starts, the computer will ask,

WHAT LETTER DO YOU WANT TO START WITH?

and wait for your response. You may type any letter to start at that letter. If you type anything else, the computer will start the lesson at "A".

No matter where in the alphabet you start, the lesson will go letter by letter to "Z" and then return you to the menu. You may interrupt the sequence and return to the menu by pressing the ESC key after any letter.

CAPITAL AND SMALL LETTERS

The menu spot marked "Aa" encourages the student to write "partner letters" (a capital letter and the corresponding small letter.) Each stroke is heralded by a blinking arrow and a little tune. When both letters have been written on the screen, an illustration appears as in the earlier lessons.

Once again, the student should first watch the letters being written, then follow the thick line with a finger in the air as the computer rewrites the letters, and finally pick up a pencil or crayon and write.

ALPHABET WORDS

There are two menu spots marked "ABC Words" and "abc words". These are identical except that the first uses capital letters to start each word and the second uses only small letters. In each lesson the initial letter is written first, with arrows and music, then a word starting with that letter is written on the screen. As in the other lessons, the letters are first written with a thin line for the student to watch, then rewritten with a thick line for the student to follow with a finger in the air. When the entire word is complete, the illustration appears.

At the end of each written screen, you will have the same choice of repeating the entire screen by pressing RETURN, going on to the next screen by pressing SPACE BAR, or pressing ESC to return to the menu.

CREATING YOUR OWN LESSON

The menu spot marked "Your own words" takes you to a unique part of the "Write Now" program. Here, you and the students can decide what to study next.

The computer clears the screen and asks,

WHAT WORD DO YOU WANT TO SEE?

It then waits for you to type in any combination of capital and small letters (spaces are also acceptable.) Be sure to press the RETURN key at the end of the word, or the computer will not know you have finished typing and will wait and wait and wait . . .

As soon as it has received all the characters and the typist presses RETURN, the "Write Now" program will start writing them on the screen exactly as it does in the other lessons.

The first letter of any "word" is always shown with arrows and music, but the rest of the letters in that word are simply written on the screen. The child may copy them after the computer finishes writing the whole word.

"Write Now" can only write letters and blanks; it will ignore anything else. It can only write as many characters as will fit on the screen at one time, and simply lops off the end of a long word. However, "long" is a relative term. Each letter has its own size and "Write Now" puts them as close together as is proper. So an eight-letter word like "lollipop" fits on the screen, while a three-letter one like "WOW" doesn't.

To get back to the menu from this section, press the ESC key instead of RETURN or SPACE BAR when the program has finished writing any screen.

If you make a typing error, use the left arrow key to back up. Then you can re-type the word.

A Fun Game! One child types his own word on the computer. The others try to guess the word as it is being written. The one who guesses correctly first may have the next turn. If the child has already had a turn, he or she may choose a friend, who hasn't yet had a turn, to go next. This can be adapted in many ways at the discretion of the leader.

Remember:

1. Always wait for the computer to ask a question or make a request before pressing any keys.

2. Always press the RETURN key after you type a word for the computer.

3. At the first sitting, one or two letters may be more than enough for a beginning writer. Don't push! At each session you can add one more, until a whole lesson is familiar and easy.

4. Children will try to anticipate what letter or word is being written. Let them. It will help them remember the similarities and differences in the letters.

THE FEEL OF IT

The hand is involved in all visual arts. Long before there was written language, people expressed themselves through drawings, sculpture, construction, and other kinds of craftsmanship. We learn about former civilizations from the artifacts they left behind, if they left no written word. The work of their hands is their communication. One generation learns from another through art. The hand is "companion" to "the mind."*

As we learn about the learner, we find that many learners who "tune out" words, learn through kinesthesia (muscle sense). They learn better through the involvement of their bodies. Hence the many uses of the kinesthetic approach to handwriting:

1. Using the body to get a feel of the shape of a letter—one child alone or a few together.

2. Writing on the learner's back.

3. Using the hand to follow the arrow, then continue to form the letter with the aid of the moving line and the music.

4. Writing letters in the air with the eyes closed.

5. Driving the car in the menu (movement in space and maneuvering in small areas).

6. Using the keyboard—the individual who finds spelling difficult, may find that the movement of fingers on the keys helps with phonics, e.g.: "Here is 'ill.' Can you type 'pill,' 'spill,' 'thrill,' etc.?"

This approach works with adults, as well as children, who are just learning to read. You can continue with other phonics like "ock," "ake," "est," etc.

* Maria Montessori

For those learners who need more help to develop the skills required for learning to write and spell, the following activities will be valuable:

ACTIVITIES FOR MANUSCRIPT HANDWRITING READINESS

ORAL ACTIVITIES

Play Follow the Leader as the children march around the room to music.

Give oral directions: Stand up. Sit down. Touch your head. Raise your left hand. Face the back of the room. Touch the top of your desk (bottom, right, left, top left, etc.)...

Describe a child. Choose someone to guess the name.

Play Simon Says using left, right, top, bottom directions. Let everyone play all the time.

Hide a bell. Have someone locate it by its sound.

Say three numbers. Have someone repeat them in the same order. Continue with 4 numbers, 5 numbers, etc.

VISUAL ACTIVITIES

Cutting, matching.

Follow a flashlight beam with your eyes.

Games: What is missing? Who is missing?

Four children stand shoulder to shoulder, leave the room, return in a different order. Another child places them as they stood originally. Give each child a numeral card to show beginning positions, then to check the results. The child hides the numerals at other times.

PERCEPTUAL-MOTOR ACTIVITIES

Hang from a bar in the playground. Move across with hands.

Turn a doorknob to enter or leave a room. Use a key to open a locked door.

Aim a flashlight on a spot. Follow a line or the moving beam of another flashlight.

Use a paintbrush and water on a blackboard.

Match corners and fold to make lines on a paper.

Walk to a line on the floor. Stop when you just touch the line. Increase the walking speed.

Fold hands. Raise the finger that someone points to.

Throw a beanbag into a waste basket.

Trace a line or shape written on the blackboard.

Obstacle course: "I'm going across the board. I'm going under the desk. I'm going to the left of the chair." (Any three directions.)

Cut on a curved or straight line.

Write a letter on a child's back. The child writes the letter in the air or on a blackboard.

Pick up small objects with the thumb and index finger.

Match peg, block, shape and letter patterns.

Do jigsaw puzzles.

WRITING

Make a straight line going down.
Make a longer line going down.
Make a shorter line going down.

Make a straight line going across.
Make a longer line going across.
Make a shorter line going across.
Make two lines the same size.

Place one hand at one end and the other hand at the other end of each of the lines to feel the difference in size.